BOOK ONE

RESISTANCE

Defining the Enemy

The enemy is a very good teacher.
—the Dalai Lama

RESISTANCE’S GREATEST HITS

The following is a list, in no particular order, of those activities that most commonly elicit Resistance:

1)The pursuit of any calling in writing, painting, music, film, dance, or any creative art, however marginal or unconventional.

2)The launching of any entrepreneurial venture or enterprise, for profit or otherwise.

3)Any diet or health regimen.

4)Any program of spiritual advancement.

5)Any activity whose aim is tighter abdominals.

6)Any course or program designed to overcome an unwholesome habit or addiction.

7)Education of every kind.

8)Any act of political, moral, or ethical courage, including the decision to change for the better some unworthy pattern of thought or conduct in ourselves.

9)The undertaking of any enterprise or endeavor whose aim is to help others.

10)Any act that entails commitment of the heart. The decision to get married, to have a child, to weather a rocky patch in a relationship.

11)The taking of any principled stand in the face of adversity.

In other words, any act that rejects immediate gratification in favor of long-term growth, health, or integrity. Or, expressed another way, any act that derives from our higher nature instead of our lower. Any of these will elicit Resistance.

Now: what are the characteristics of Resistance?

RESISTANCE IS INVISIBLE

Resistance cannot be seen, touched, heard, or smelled. But it can be felt. We experience it as an energy field radiating from a work-in-potential. It’s a repelling force. It’s negative. Its aim is to shove us away, distract us, prevent us from doing our work.

RESISTANCE IS INTERNAL

Resistance seems to come from outside ourselves. We locate it in spouses, jobs, bosses, kids. “Peripheral opponents,” as Pat Riley used to say when he coached the Los Angeles Lakers.

Resistance is not a peripheral opponent. Resistance arises from within. It is self-generated and self-perpetuated. Resistance is the enemy within.

RESISTANCE IS INSIDIOUS

Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. It will perjure, fabricate, falsify; seduce, bully, cajole. Resistance is protean. It will assume any form, if that's what it takes to deceive you. It will reason with you like a lawyer or jam a nine-millimeter in your face like a stickup man. Resistance has no conscience. It will pledge anything to get a deal, then double-cross you as soon as your back is turned. If you take Resistance at its word, you deserve everything you get. Resistance is always lying and always full of shit.

RESISTANCE IS IMPLACABLE

Resistance is like the Alien or the Terminator or the shark in *Jaws*. It cannot be reasoned with. It understands nothing but power. It is an engine of destruction, programmed from the factory with one object only: to prevent us from doing our work. Resistance is implacable, intractable, indefatigable. Reduce it to a single cell and that cell will continue to attack.
This is Resistance’s nature. It’s all it knows.

RESISTANCE IS IMPERSONAL

Resistance is not out to get you personally. It doesn’t know who you are and doesn’t care. Resistance is a force of nature. It acts objectively.
Though it feels malevolent, Resistance in fact operates with the indifference of rain and transits the heavens by the same laws as the stars. When we marshal our forces to combat Resistance, we must remember this.

RESISTANCE IS INFALLIBLE

Like a magnetized needle floating on a surface of oil, Resistance will unfailingly point to true North—meaning that calling or action it most wants to stop us from doing.

We can use this. We can use it as a compass. We can navigate by Resistance, letting it guide us to that calling or action that we must follow before all others.

Rule of thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul’s evolution, the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it.

RESISTANCE IS UNIVERSAL

We’re wrong if we think we’re the only ones struggling with Resistance. Everyone who has a body experiences Resistance.

RESISTANCE NEVER SLEEPS

Henry Fonda was still throwing up before each stage performance, even when he was seventy-five. In other words, fear doesn’t go away. The warrior and the artist live by the same code of necessity, which dictates that the battle must be fought anew every day.

RESISTANCE PLAYS FOR KEEPS

Resistance’s goal is not to wound or disable. Resistance aims to kill. Its target is the epicenter of our being: our genius, our soul, the unique and priceless gift we were put on earth to give and that no one else has but us. Resistance means business. When we fight it, we are in a war to the death.

RESISTANCE IS FUELED BY FEAR

Resistance has no strength of its own. Every ounce of juice it possesses comes from us. We feed it with power by our fear of it. Master that fear and we conquer Resistance.

RESISTANCE ONLY OPPOSES

IN ONE DIRECTION

Resistance obstructs movement only from a lower sphere to a higher. It kicks in when we seek to pursue a calling in the arts, launch an innovative enterprise, or evolve to a higher station morally, ethically, or spiritually. So if you're in Calcutta working with the Mother Teresa Foundation and you're thinking of bolting to launch a career in telemarketing. . . relax. Resistance will give you a free pass.

RESISTANCE IS MOST POWERFUL

AT THE FINISH LINE

Odysseus almost got home years before his actual homecoming. Ithaca was in sight, close enough that the sailors could see the smoke of their families' fires on shore. Odysseus was so certain he was safe, he actually lay down for a snooze. It was then that his men, believing there was gold in an ox-hide sack among their commander's possessions, snatched this prize and cut it open. The bag contained the adverse Winds, which King Aeolus had bottled up for Odysseus when the wanderer had touched earlier at his blessed isle. The winds burst forth now in one mad blow, driving Odysseus' ships back across every league of ocean they had with such difficulty traversed, making him endure further trials and sufferings before, at last and alone, he reached home for good.

The danger is greatest when the finish line is in sight. At this point, Resistance knows we're about to beat it. It hits the panic button. It marshals one last assault and slams us with everything it's got.

The professional must be alert for this counterattack. Be wary at the end. Don't open that bag of wind.

RESISTANCE RECRUITS ALLIES

Resistance by definition is self-sabotage. But there's a parallel peril that must also be guarded against: sabotage by others.

When a writer begins to overcome her Resistance—in other words, when she actually starts to write—she may find that those close to her begin acting strange. They may become moody or sullen, they may get sick; they may accuse the awakening writer of "changing," of "not being the person she was." The closer these people are to the awakening writer, the more bizarrely they will act and the more emotion they will put behind their actions.

They are trying to sabotage her.

The reason is that they are struggling, consciously or unconsciously, against their own Resistance. The awakening writer's success becomes a reproach to them. If she can beat these demons, why can't they?

Often couples or close friends, even entire families, will enter into tacit compacts whereby each individual pledges (unconsciously) to remain mired in the same slough in which she and all her cronies have become so comfortable. The highest treason a crab can commit is to make a leap for the rim of the bucket.

The awakening artist must be ruthless, not only with herself but with others. Once you make your break, you can't turn around for your buddy who catches his trouser leg on the barbed wire. The best thing you can do for that friend (and he'd tell you this himself, if he really is your friend) is to get over the wall and keep motating.

The best and only thing that one artist can do for another is to serve as an example and an inspiration.

Now, let's consider the next aspect of Resistance: symptoms.

RESISTANCE AND PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is the most common manifestation of Resistance because it’s the easiest to rationalize. We don’t tell ourselves, “I’m never going to write my symphony.” Instead we say, “I am going to write my symphony; I’m just going to start tomorrow.”

RESISTANCE AND PROCRASTINATION,

PART TWO

The most pernicious aspect of procrastination is that it can become a habit. We don’t just put off our lives today; we put them off till our deathbed. Never forget: This very moment, we can change our lives. There never was a moment, and never will be, when we are without the power to alter our destiny. This second, we can turn the tables on Resistance.
This second, we can sit down and do our work.

RESISTANCE AND SEX

Sometimes Resistance takes the form of sex, or an obsessive preoccupation with sex. Why sex? Because sex provides immediate and powerful gratification. When someone sleeps with us, we feel validated and approved of, even loved. Resistance gets a big kick out of that. It knows it has distracted us with a cheap, easy fix and kept us from doing our work.

Of course not all sex is a manifestation of Resistance. In my experience, you can tell by the measure of hollowness you feel afterward. The more empty you feel, the more certain you can be that your true motivation was not love or even lust but Resistance.

It goes without saying that this principle applies to drugs, shopping, masturbation, TV, gossip, alcohol, and the consumption of all products containing fat, sugar, salt, or chocolate.

RESISTANCE AND TROUBLE

We get ourselves in trouble because it’s a cheap way to get attention. Trouble is a faux form of fame. It’s easier to get busted in the bedroom with the faculty chairman’s wife than it is to finish that dissertation on the metaphysics of motley in the novellas of Joseph Conrad.

Ill health is a form of trouble, as are alcoholism and drug addiction, proneness to accidents, all neurosis including compulsive screwing-up, and such seemingly benign foibles as jealousy, chronic lateness, and the blasting of rap music at 110 dB from your smoked-glass ’95 Supra. Anything that draws attention to ourselves through pain-free or artificial means is a manifestation of Resistance.

Cruelty to others is a form of Resistance, as is the willing endurance of cruelty from others.

The working artist will not tolerate trouble in her life because she knows trouble prevents her from doing her work. The working artist banishes from her world all sources of trouble. She harnesses the urge for trouble and transforms it in her work.

RESISTANCE AND SELF-DRAMATIZATION

Creating soap opera in our lives is a symptom of Resistance. Why put in years of work designing a new software interface when you can get just as much attention by bringing home a boyfriend with a prison record? Sometimes entire families participate unconsciously in a culture of self-dramatization. The kids fuel the tanks, the grown-ups arm the phasers, the whole starship lurches from one spine-tingling episode to another. And the crew knows how to keep it going. If the level of drama drops below a certain threshold, someone jumps in to amp it up. Dad gets drunk, Mom gets sick, Janie shows up for church with an Oakland Raiders tattoo. It’s more fun than a movie. And it works: Nobody gets a damn thing done. Sometimes I think of Resistance as a sort of evil twin to Santa Claus, who makes his rounds house-to-house, making sure that everything’s taken care of. When he comes to a house that’s hooked on self-dramatization, his ruddy cheeks glow and he giddy-ups away behind his eight tiny reindeer. He knows there’ll be no work done in that house.

RESISTANCE AND SELF-MEDICATION

Do you regularly ingest any substance, controlled or otherwise, whose aim is the alleviation of depression, anxiety, etc.? I offer the following experience:

I once worked as a writer for a big New York ad agency. Our boss used to tell us: Invent a disease. Come up with the disease, he said, and we can sell the cure.

Attention Deficit Disorder, Seasonal Affect Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder. These aren't diseases, they're marketing ploys. Doctors didn't discover them, copywriters did. Marketing departments did. Drug companies did.

Depression and anxiety may be real. But they can also be Resistance. When we drug ourselves to blot out our soul's call, we are being good Americans and exemplary consumers. We're doing exactly what TV commercials and pop materialist culture have been brainwashing us to do from birth. Instead of applying self-knowledge, self-discipline, delayed gratification and hard work, we simply consume a product.

Many pedestrians have been maimed or killed at the intersection of Resistance and Commerce.

RESISTANCE AND VICTIMHOOD

Doctors estimate that seventy to eighty percent of their business is non-health-related. People aren’t sick, they’re self-dramatizing. Sometimes the hardest part of a medical job is keeping a straight face. As Jerry Seinfeld observed of his twenty years of dating: “That’s a lot of acting fascinated.” The acquisition of a condition lends significance to one’s existence. An illness, a cross to bear. Some people go from condition to condition; they cure one, and another pops up to take its place. The condition becomes a work of art in itself, a shadow version of the real creative act the victim is avoiding by expending so much care cultivating his condition.

A victim act is a form of passive aggression. It seeks to achieve gratification not by honest work or a contribution made out of one’s experience or insight or love, but by the manipulation of others through silent (and not-so-silent) threat. The victim compels others to come to his rescue or to behave as he wishes by holding them hostage to the prospect of his own further illness/meltdown/mental dissolution, or simply by threatening to make their lives so miserable that they do what he wants. Casting yourself as a victim is the antithesis of doing your work. Don’t do it. If you’re doing it, stop.

RESISTANCE AND

THE CHOICE OF A MATE

Sometimes, if we're not conscious of our own Resistance, we'll pick as a mate someone who has or is successfully overcoming Resistance. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's easier to endow our partner with the power that we in fact possess but are afraid to act upon. Maybe it's less threatening to believe that our beloved spouse is worthy to live out his or her unlived life, while we are not. Or maybe we're hoping to use our mate as a model. Maybe we believe (or wish we could) that some of our spouse's power will rub off on us, if we just hang around it long enough.

This is how Resistance disfigures love. The stew it creates is rich, it's colorful; Tennessee Williams could work it up into a trilogy. But is it love? If we're the supporting partner, shouldn't we face our own failure to pursue our unlived life, rather than hitchhike on our spouse's coattails? And if we're the supported partner, shouldn't we step out from the glow of our loved one's adoration and instead encourage him to let his own light shine?

RESISTANCE AND THIS BOOK

When I began this book, Resistance almost beat me. This is the form it took. It told me (the voice in my head) that I was a writer of fiction, not nonfiction, and that I shouldn't be exposing these concepts of Resistance literally and overtly; rather, I should incorporate them metaphorically into a novel. That's a pretty damn subtle and convincing argument. The rationalization Resistance presented me with was that I should write, say, a war piece in which the principles of Resistance were expressed as the fear a warrior feels.

Resistance also told me I shouldn't seek to instruct, or put myself forward as a purveyor of wisdom; that this was vain, egotistical, possibly even corrupt, and that it would work harm to me in the end. That scared me. It made a lot of sense.

What finally convinced me to go ahead was simply that I was so unhappy not going ahead. I was developing symptoms. As soon as I sat down and began, I was okay.

RESISTANCE AND UNHAPPINESS

What does Resistance feel like?
First, unhappiness. We feel like hell. A low-grade misery pervades everything. We're bored, we're restless. We can't get no satisfaction. There's guilt but we can't put our finger on the source. We want to go back to bed; we want to get up and party. We feel unloved and unlovable. We're disgusted. We hate our lives. We hate ourselves.
Unalleviated, Resistance mounts to a pitch that becomes unendurable. At this point vices kick in. Dope, adultery, web surfing.
Beyond that, Resistance becomes clinical. Depression, aggression, dysfunction. Then actual crime and physical self-destruction.
Sounds like life, I know. It isn't. It's Resistance.
What makes it tricky is that we live in a consumer culture that's acutely aware of this unhappiness and has massed all its profit-seeking artillery to exploit it. By selling us a product, a drug, a distraction. John Lennon once wrote:
Well, you think you're so clever
and classless and free
But you're all fucking peasants
As far as I can see
As artists and professionals it is our obligation to enact our own internal revolution, a private insurrection inside our own skulls. In this uprising we free ourselves from the tyranny of consumer culture. We overthrow the programming of advertising, movies, video games, magazines, TV, and MTV by which we have been hypnotized from the cradle. We unplug ourselves from the grid by recognizing that we will never cure our restlessness by contributing our disposable income to the bottom line of Bullshit, Inc., but only by doing our work.

RESISTANCE AND FUNDAMENTALISM

The artist and the fundamentalist both confront the same issue, the mystery of their existence as individuals. Each asks the same questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life?

At more primitive stages of evolution, humanity didn't have to deal with such questions. In the states of savagery, of barbarism, in nomadic culture, medieval society, in the tribe and the clan, one's position was fixed by the commandments of the community. It was only with the advent of modernity (starting with the ancient Greeks), with the birth of freedom and of the individual, that such matters ascended to the fore.

These are not easy questions. Who am I? Why am I here? They're not easy because the human being isn't wired to function as an individual. We're wired tribally, to act as part of a group. Our psyches are programmed by millions of years of hunter-gatherer evolution. We know what the clan is; we know how to fit into the band and the tribe. What we don't know is how to be alone. We don't know how to be free individuals.

The artist and the fundamentalist arise from societies at differing stages of development. The artist is the advanced model. His culture possesses affluence, stability, enough excess of resource to permit the luxury of self-examination. The artist is grounded in freedom. He is not afraid of it. He is lucky. He was born in the right place. He has a core of self-confidence, of hope for the future. He believes in progress and evolution. His faith is that humankind is advancing, however haltingly and imperfectly, toward a better world.

The fundamentalist entertains no such notion. In his view, humanity has fallen from a higher state. The truth is not out there awaiting revelation; it has already been revealed. The word of God has been spoken and recorded by His prophet, be he Jesus, Muhammad, or Karl Marx.

Fundamentalism is the philosophy of the powerless, the conquered, the displaced and the dispossessed. Its spawning ground is the wreckage of political and military defeat, as Hebrew fundamentalism arose during the Babylonian captivity, as white Christian fundamentalism appeared in the American South during Reconstruction, as the notion of the Master Race evolved in Germany following World War I. In such desperate times, the

vanquished race would perish without a doctrine that restored hope and pride. Islamic fundamentalism ascends from the same landscape of despair and possesses the same tremendous and potent appeal.

What exactly is this despair? It is the despair of freedom. The dislocation and emasculation experienced by the individual cut free from the familiar and comforting structures of the tribe and the clan, the village and the family.

It is the state of modern life.

The fundamentalist (or, more accurately, the beleaguered individual who comes to embrace fundamentalism) cannot stand freedom. He cannot find his way into the future, so he retreats to the past. He returns in imagination to the glory days of his race and seeks to reconstitute both them and himself in their purer, more virtuous light. He gets back to basics. To fundamentals.

Fundamentalism and art are mutually exclusive. There is no such thing as fundamentalist art. This does not mean that the fundamentalist is not creative. Rather, his creativity is inverted. He creates destruction. Even the structures he builds, his schools and networks of organization, are dedicated to annihilation, of his enemies and of himself.

But the fundamentalist reserves his greatest creativity for the fashioning of Satan, the image of his foe, in opposition to which he defines and gives meaning to his own life. Like the artist, the fundamentalist experiences Resistance. He experiences it as temptation to sin. Resistance to the fundamentalist is the call of the Evil One, seeking to seduce him from his virtue. The fundamentalist is consumed with Satan, whom he loves as he loves death. Is it coincidence that the suicide bombers of the World Trade Center frequented strip clubs during their training, or that they conceived of their reward as a squadron of virgin brides and the license to ravish them in the fleshpots of heaven? The fundamentalist hates and fears women because he sees them as vessels of Satan, temptresses like Delilah who seduced Samson from his power.

To combat the call of sin, i.e., Resistance, the fundamentalist plunges either into action or into the study of sacred texts. He loses himself in these, much as the artist does in the process of creation. The difference is that while the one looks forward, hoping to create a better world, the other looks backward, seeking to return to a purer world from which he and all have fallen.

The humanist believes that humankind, as individuals, is called upon to co-create the world with God. This is why he values human life so highly. In his view, things do progress, life does evolve; each individual has value, at least potentially, in advancing this cause. The fundamentalist cannot conceive of this. In his society, dissent is not just crime but apostasy; it is heresy, transgression against God Himself.

When fundamentalism wins, the world enters a dark age. Yet still I can't condemn one who is drawn to this philosophy. I consider my own inner journey, the advantages I've had of education, affluence, family support, health, and the blind good luck to be born American, and still I have learned to exist as an autonomous individual, if indeed I have, only by a whisker, and at a cost I would hate to have to reckon up.

It may be that the human race is not ready for freedom. The air of liberty may be too rarefied for us to breathe. Certainly I wouldn't be writing this book, on this subject, if living with freedom were easy. The paradox seems to be, as Socrates demonstrated long ago, that the truly free individual is free only to the extent of his own self-mastery. While those who will not govern themselves are condemned to find masters to govern over them.

RESISTANCE AND CRITICISM

If you find yourself criticizing other people, you’re probably doing it out of Resistance. When we see others beginning to live their authentic selves, it drives us crazy if we have not lived out our own.
Individuals who are realized in their own lives almost never criticize others. If they speak at all, it is to offer encouragement. Watch yourself. Of all the manifestations of Resistance, most only harm ourselves. Criticism and cruelty harm others as well.

RESISTANCE AND SELF-DOUBT

Self-doubt can be an ally. This is because it serves as an indicator of aspiration. It reflects love, love of something we dream of doing, and desire, desire to do it. If you find yourself asking yourself (and your friends), “Am I really a writer? Am I really an artist?” chances are you are. The counterfeit innovator is wildly self-confident. The real one is scared to death.

RESISTANCE AND FEAR

Are you paralyzed with fear? That's a good sign.
Fear is good. Like self-doubt, fear is an indicator. Fear tells us what we have to do.
Remember our rule of thumb: The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it.
Resistance is experienced as fear; the degree of fear equates to the strength of Resistance. Therefore the more fear we feel about a specific enterprise, the more certain we can be that that enterprise is important to us and to the growth of our soul. That's why we feel so much Resistance. If it meant nothing to us, there'd be no Resistance.
Have you ever watched *Inside the Actors Studio?* The host, James Lipton, invariably asks his guests, "What factors make you decide to take a particular role?" The actor always answers: "Because I'm afraid of it."
The professional tackles the project that will make him stretch. He takes on the assignment that will bear him into uncharted waters, compel him to explore unconscious parts of himself.
Is he scared? Hell, yes. He's petrified.
(Conversely, the professional turns down roles that he's done before. He's not afraid of them anymore. Why waste his time?)
So if you're paralyzed with fear, it's a good sign. It shows you what you have to do.

RESISTANCE AND LOVE

Resistance is directly proportional to love. If you're feeling massive Resistance, the good news is, it means there's tremendous love there too. If you didn't love the project that is terrifying you, you wouldn't feel anything. The opposite of love isn't hate; it's indifference.
The more Resistance you experience, the more important your unmanifested art/project/enterprise is to you—and the more gratification you will feel when you finally do it.

RESISTANCE AND BEING A STAR

Grandiose fantasies are a symptom of Resistance. They’re the sign of an amateur. The professional has learned that success, like happiness, comes as a by-product of work.

The professional concentrates on the work and allows rewards to come or not come, whatever they like.

RESISTANCE AND ISOLATION

Sometimes we balk at embarking on an enterprise because we're afraid of being alone. We feel comfortable with the tribe around us; it makes us nervous going off into the woods on our own.

Here's the trick: We're never alone. As soon as we step outside the campfire glow, our Muse lights on our shoulder like a butterfly. The act of courage calls forth infallibly that deeper part of ourselves that supports and sustains us.

Have you seen interviews with the young John Lennon or Bob Dylan, when the reporter tries to ask about their personal selves? The boys deflect these queries with withering sarcasm. Why? Because Lennon and Dylan know that the part of them that writes the songs is not "them," not the personal self that is of such surpassing fascination to their boneheaded interrogators. Lennon and Dylan also know that the part of themselves that does the writing is too sacred, too precious, too fragile to be redacted into sound bites for the titillation of would-be idolators (who are themselves caught up in their own Resistance). So they put them on and blow them off.

It is a commonplace among artists and children at play that they're not aware of time or solitude while they're chasing their vision. The hours fly. The sculptress and the tree-climbing tyke both look up blinking when Mom calls, "Suppertime!"

RESISTANCE AND ISOLATION,

PART TWO

Friends sometimes ask, “Don’t you get lonely sitting by yourself all day?” At first it seemed odd to hear myself answer No. Then I realized that I was not alone; I was in the book; I was with the characters. I was with my Self. Not only do I not feel alone with my characters; they are more vivid and interesting to me than the people in my real life. If you think about it, the case can’t be otherwise. In order for a book (or any project or enterprise) to hold our attention for the length of time it takes to unfold itself, it has to plug into some internal perplexity or passion that is of paramount importance to us. That problem becomes the theme of our work, even if we can’t at the start understand or articulate it. As the characters arise, each embodies infallibly an aspect of that dilemma, that perplexity. These characters might not be interesting to anyone else but they’re absolutely fascinating to us. They are us. Meaner, smarter, sexier versions of ourselves. It’s fun to be with them because they’re wrestling with the same issue that has its hooks into us. They’re our soul mates, our lovers, our best friends. Even the villains. Especially the villains.

Even in a book like this, which has no characters, I don’t feel alone because I’m imagining the reader, whom I conjure as an aspiring artist much like my own younger, less grizzled self, to whom I hope to impart a little starch and inspiration and prime, a little, with some hard-knocks wisdom and a few tricks of the trade.

RESISTANCE AND HEALING

Have you ever spent time in Santa Fe? There's a subculture of "healing" there. The idea is that there's something therapeutic in the atmosphere. A safe place to go and get yourself together. There are other places (Santa Barbara and Ojai, California, come to mind), usually populated by upper-middle-class people with more time and money than they know what to do with, in which a culture of healing also obtains. The concept in all these environments seems to be that one needs to complete his healing before he is ready to do his work.

This way of thinking (are you ahead of me?) is a form of Resistance.

What are we trying to heal, anyway? The athlete knows the day will never come when he wakes up pain-free. He has to play hurt.

Remember, the part of us that we imagine needs healing is not the part we create from; that part is far deeper and stronger. The part we create from can't be touched by anything our parents did, or society did. That part is unsullied, uncorrupted; soundproof, waterproof, and bulletproof. In fact, the more troubles we've got, the better and richer that part becomes.

The part that needs healing is our personal life. Personal life has nothing to do with work. Besides, what better way of healing than to find our center of self-sovereignty? Isn't that the whole point of healing?

I washed up in New York a couple of decades ago, making twenty bucks a night driving a cab and running away full- time from doing my work. One night, alone in my $110-a- month sublet, I hit bottom in terms of having diverted myself into so many phony channels so many times that I couldn't rationalize it for one more evening. I dragged out my ancient Smith-Corona, dreading the experience as pointless, fruitless, meaningless, not to say the most painful exercise I could think of. For two hours I made myself sit there, torturing out some trash that I chucked immediately into the shitcan. That was enough. I put the machine away. I went back to the kitchen. In the sink sat ten days of dishes. For some reason I had enough excess energy that I decided to wash them. The warm water felt pretty good. The soap and sponge were doing their thing. A pile of clean plates began rising in the drying rack. To my amazement I realized I was whistling.

It hit me that I had turned a corner.

I was okay.
I would be okay from here on.
Do you understand? I hadn’t written anything good. It might be years before I would, if I ever did at all. That didn’t matter. What counted was that I had, after years of running from it, actually sat down and done my work.
Don’t get me wrong. I’ve got nothing against true healing. We all need it. But it has nothing to do with doing our work and it can be a colossal exercise in Resistance. Resistance loves “healing.” Resistance knows that the more psychic energy we expend dredging and re-dredging the tired, boring injustices of our personal lives, the less juice we have to do our work.

RESISTANCE AND SUPPORT

Have you ever been to a workshop? These boondoggles are colleges of Resistance. They ought to give out Ph.D.'s in Resistance. What better way of avoiding work than going to a workshop? But what I hate even worse is the word *support*.

Seeking support from friends and family is like having your people gathered around at your deathbed. It's nice, but when the ship sails, all they can do is stand on the dock waving goodbye.

Any support we get from persons of flesh and blood is like Monopoly money; it's not legal tender in that sphere where we have to do our work. In fact, the more energy we spend stoking up on support from colleagues and loved ones, the weaker we become and the less capable of handling our business.

My friend Carol had the following dream, at a time when her life felt like it was careening out of control:

She was a passenger on a bus. Bruce Springsteen was driving. Suddenly Springsteen pulled over, handed Carol the keys, and bolted. In the dream Carol was panicking. How could she drive this huge rolling Greyhound? By now all the passengers were staring. Clearly no one else was gonna step forward and take charge. Carol took the wheel. To her amazement, she found she could handle it.

Later, analyzing the dream, she figured Bruce Springsteen was "The Boss." The boss of her psyche. The bus was the vehicle of her life. The Boss was telling Carol it was time to take the wheel. More than that, the dream, by actually setting her down in the driver's seat and letting her feel that she could control the vehicle on the road, was providing her with a simulator run, to prime her with the confidence that she could actually take command in her life.

A dream like that is real support. It's a check you can cash when you sit down, alone, to do your work.

P.S. When your deeper Self delivers a dream like that, don't talk about it. Don't dilute its power. The dream is for you. It's between you and your Muse. Shut up and use it.

The only exception is, you may share it with another comrade-in-arms, if sharing it will help or encourage that comrade in his or her own endeavors.

RESISTANCE AND RATIONALIZATION

Rationalization is Resistance’s right-hand man. Its job is to keep us from feeling the shame we would feel if we truly faced what cowards we are for not doing our work.

MICHAEL

Don’t knock rationalization. Where would we be without it? I don’t know anyone who can get through the day without two or three juicy rationalizations. They’re more important than sex.

SAM

Aw, come on! Nothing’s more important than sex.

MICHAEL

Oh yeah? Have you ever gone a week without a rationalization?
—Jeff Goldblum and Tom Berenger, in Lawrence Kasdan’s *The Big Chill*
But rationalization has its own sidekick. It’s that part of our psyche that actually believes what rationalization tells us.
It’s one thing to lie to ourselves. It’s another thing to believe it.

RESISTANCE AND RATIONALIZATION,

PART TWO

Resistance is fear. But Resistance is too cunning to show itself naked in this form. Why? Because if Resistance lets us see clearly that our own fear is preventing us from doing our work, we may feel shame at this. And shame may drive us to act in the face of fear.

Resistance doesn't want us to do this. So it brings in Rationalization. Rationalization is Resistance's spin doctor. It's Resistance's way of hiding the Big Stick behind its back. Instead of showing us our fear (which might shame us and impel us to do our work), Resistance presents us with a series of plausible, rational justifications for why we shouldn't do our work.

What's particularly insidious about the rationalizations that Resistance presents to us is that a lot of them are true. They're legitimate. Our wife may really be in her eighth month of pregnancy; she may in truth need us at home. Our department may really be instituting a changeover that will eat up hours of our time. Indeed it may make sense to put off finishing our dissertation, at least till after the baby's born.

What Resistance leaves out, of course, is that all this means diddly. Tolstoy had thirteen kids and wrote *War and Peace*. Lance Armstrong had cancer and won the Tour de France three years and counting.

RESISTANCE CAN BE BEATEN

If Resistance couldn’t be beaten, there would be no Fifth Symphony, no *Romeo and Juliet*, no Golden Gate Bridge. Defeating Resistance is like giving birth. It seems absolutely impossible until you remember that women have been pulling it off successfully, with support and without, for fifty million years.